

Fri 1-4-13 Daily Breeze

# Undersheriff's questionable political machinations is his moonlight job

**L**OS Angeles County Undersheriff Paul Tanaka's decision to withdraw his campaign for a third term as mayor of Gardena is a responsible choice. After all, he is facing an FBI investigation for allegedly condoning violence by deputies under his command against county jail inmates.

Though he remains on the ballot (it was too late to prevent that) he is not actively seeking the post. Still, something doesn't smell right about his announcement this week that he will simply step aside and support Gardena City Councilwoman Rachel Johnson's bid for mayor.

When he was promoted in June 2011 to what would become a short-lived reign as overseer of the county's jail system, Tanaka warned that the extra work duties would likely prevent him from seeking a third term as Gardena's mayor. But Tanaka was stripped of his jail command duties about a year later after an independent citizen's report cited the Sheriff's Department for alleged brutal beatings of inmates at the hands of deputies.

Shortly afterward, Tanaka filed candidacy papers for a third term as mayor because, as he claims, it appeared no one else on the City Council would run for the job. In a letter obtained earlier this week, Tanaka wrote that Johnson had previously declined his support in a mayoral bid.

But Tanaka's claim of ignorance doesn't hold water. At least one sitting City Council member — Dan Medina — said he told Tanaka that he would run for mayor if the incumbent chose to bow out of the race.

On the surface, Tanaka's decision appears to be gracious deference to Johnson. Maybe Tanaka was worried about a nasty re-election battle — something the quiet South Bay city of Gardena is not used to. Maybe the county jail abuse probe — coupled with previous allegations that Tanaka coerced deputies to donate to his political campaigns — are finally gaining traction.

Or, perhaps it was a calculated effort to keep other qualified candidates like Medina from entering the race, given the fact that it is difficult to defeat well-funded incumbents like Tanaka. Medina admitted that he ultimately sat out the race because he didn't want to mount an uphill battle against the sitting mayor.

Johnson told one of our reporters that she was disappointed that Gardena's voters won't have much of a choice among mayoral candidates in March. Voters should feel the same.

Johnson's background as a longtime educator with the Los Angeles Unified School District and three-term councilwoman certainly makes her qualified to serve as Gardena's next mayor. But competition is good democracy.

Given the latest development, Medina — and just about any other registered voter living in Gardena — have until Feb. 19 to decide whether to wage a write-in campaign for mayor. We encourage them to do so.



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Daily Breeze

# Ridley-Thomas urges Gardena vest-sale review

WED 2-20-13

By Sandy Mazza Staff Writer

A Los Angeles County supervisor is seeking a "rigorous" re-examination of a decade-old issue in which the city of Gardena acted as an intermediary for the Sheriff's Department to sell ballistic vests to Cambodia.

The sale was scrutinized at least twice in the past 10 years because it was so unusual but, despite appearing convoluted, nothing illegal or improper was found.

This week, after recent news reports again questioned the transaction, Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas called for another audit of the purchase.

Former Sheriff's Department Assistant Sheriff Larry Waldie negotiated the sale, according to Under-sheriff Paul Tanaka, who is the current mayor of Gardena.

At the time, Cambodia was rebuilding its country and police force following Khmer Rouge communist party rule, Tanaka said. The Cambodian foreign consulate asked Waldie if it could purchase 473 ballistic vests that the department would not use because they were either expired or used, he said.

Tanaka was in his second year as a Gardena city councilman and was also the sheriff's chief of admin-

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## VESTS

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istrative services. Waldie asked for his help because he didn't believe Los Angeles County could sell directly to a foreign country, he said.

"I was the commanding officer of the Asian Crime Task Force so we made a lot of contacts with law enforcement agencies in Asia," Tanaka said. "Cambodia went to (Waldie) and asked to purchase anything we had. (Waldie) asked if my city would buy these old vests because ... they were going to go to salvage. The city of Gardena bid on them. There was no other bidder. So they

wrote a check and the foreign consulate of Cambodia repaid Gardena and picked up the vests."

The sale included 173 unused, expired vests for \$5,190 and 300 used vests for \$3,000, according to county documents.

Sheriff's spokesman Steve Whitmore said Waldie was wrong: Los Angeles County does not restrict its sales to foreign countries and Cambodia should have purchased the vests directly. But Whitmore said it was only a mistake rather than some sort of coverup.

Ridley-Thomas believes something untoward may have taken place in that transaction, especially because he claims the vests were also

transported unusually.

"At least 173 of these vests were reportedly sent to Cambodia inside a patrol car, one of several vehicles which was also sent to Cambodia," Ridley-Thomas said in a written statement. "Serious questions remain about the propriety of the actions undertaken, and we need a rigorous and thorough exploration of the circumstances and the facts."

Sheriff's officials did not have information about how the vests were shipped, and Ridley-Thomas did not say how he learned that they were sent inside police cars.

Tanaka insists the sale was innocent.

"There was no profit, no nothing," he said. "If you look at the invoices, these are \$10

vests. There's no way anyone in America can use them because of the liability of Key-lar. This thing has been investigated so many times over the last 10 years and there was no violation."

Federal officials reportedly looked into the sale shortly after it took place in 2002. Last year, the Los Angeles County Auditor-Controller's Office investigated and found nothing wrong with Gardena purchasing the vests from Los Angeles County. However, that audit did not look

into Cambodia's subsequent purchase of the vests from Gardena.

On Tuesday, Ridley-Thomas asked for another audit to investigate how the vests were shipped to Cambodia and whether any illegal activity took place by sheriff's officials.

Gardena Councilwoman Rachel Johnson, who is currently running against Tanaka to be the next mayor of Gardena, said she is concerned about the issue and Tanaka's involvement.

"What is suspicious is how the transaction happened, how the vests were shipped to Cambodia," Johnson said. "If it was a Sheriff's Department transaction, why was Gardena even involved? The deal shouldn't have been done to begin with if the Sheriff's Department wasn't allowed to do the transaction directly (with Cambodia). That is the mistake."

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McDONNELL LEAVING?

# LBPD's chief may challenge Lee Baca

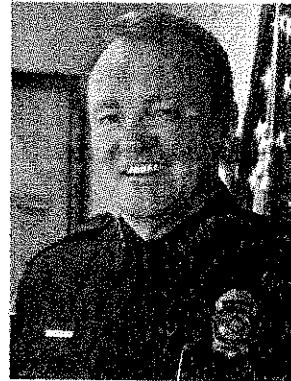
WFO 2-6-13 Press-Telegram

By Tracy Manzer  
Staff Writer

LONG BEACH — The city's No. 1 cop, who once rose to second-in-command in the Los Angeles Police Department, may now be setting his sights even higher in a bid for Los Angeles County sheriff.

"When I was on the jail commission, a few people reached out and asked 'Would you be interested in running for sheriff?'" Long Beach Police Chief Jim McDonnell said Tuesday. "I'm still not certain what I will do... but it's an honor to be thought of."

Running for sheriff is a major undertaking, with the odds set steeply against anyone who tries to unseat incumbent Sheriff Lee Baca, McDonnell and others said.



Jeff Gritchen Staff Photographer  
Long Beach Police Chief Jim McDonnell, who took over the LBPD in March 2010, may run for Los Angeles County sheriff.

But with Baca coming under heavy criticism in the

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**SHERIFF**

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past year over the condition of the county jail system, including the number of use-of-force incidents, as well as issues within his own command staff, and his seat up for election next year, McDonnell said now may be the time to consider a jump from Long Beach to Los Angeles County.

McDonnell also served on the Citizens' Commission on Jail Violence, which in September issued a searing indictment of Baca, blaming his "failure of leadership" for deputies engaging in a pattern of excessive use of force against inmates. The commission urged sweeping reforms of the jail system.

McDonnell said changes could be made throughout the Sheriff's Department.

"They are a large agency. The challenges that they are facing are immense," McDonnell said. "It's certainly an opportunity for someone with fresh eyes to come in and modify, to make some changes for the department and the community it serves," McDonnell said.

Though he is still discussing the possibility with his family, the decision will likely have to be made within the next month, McDonnell said.

"My goal, if I do decide to run, is to consider working here as chief of Long Beach and working weekends and nights on campaigning."

No matter where he works, McDonnell added, he will remain a resident of Long Beach.

"It's where we've raised our daughters, it's our home," he said.

McDonnell served 30 years with the LAPD, rising to second-in-command under former LAPD Chief Bill Bratton. He took over the Long Beach Police Department in March 2010.

Many of the officers in McDonnell's command ranks said they were aware McDonnell was thinking about the move, but nearly as many of the rank-and-file were surprised by the news Tuesday. The reaction was overwhelmingly positive, with officers working in patrol and detective divisions saying they understand why McDonnell would want a shot at the single largest sheriff's department in the country, though it would be a loss for Long Beach.

"I'm honored that that's the reaction and encouraged by it. We have a great organization here," McDonnell said. "I would put this team up against any as far as what they contribute to the community from a public safety standpoint."

Long Beach Police Officers Association Steve James said he was among those who knew as early as January that McDonnell was considering the bid for sheriff.

McDonnell said that though he was tapped by "interested parties" in the county who wanted to know if he would consider a run against Baca when he was serving on the jail commission, that interest grew signif-

ess - The Long Beach  
icantly in the past month.

"I think timing is everything," James said. "I think that the position is up in 2014. It's the type of position that takes probably a good year to run for. I don't think he wants to leave Long Beach. ... I think it's an opportunity for a personal and professional challenge."

"It's a potential opportunity that not many people in our profession have. ... It's one of the best law enforcement jobs in the country."

Baca's spokesman, Steve Whitmore, said Tuesday that Baca likes McDonnell but the sheriff doesn't see the Long Beach police chief, or any other candidate, as a threat to his re-election.

"Don't forget, the sheriff's got the endorsement of Gov. (Jerry) Brown. He's got (former) Gov. (Gray) Davis, he's got the former District Attorney Steve Cooley, he's got Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, he's got former (LAPD) Chief Bill Bratton," Whitmore said.

Baca, Whitmore added, listened to the criticism of many in the region and brought out sweeping changes and reform within the Sheriff's Department command staff and its jail system.

The sheriff, who begins every morning with an 8- to 10-mile run, has spent nearly 50 years in the Sheriff's Department.

It's a difficult job, considering the sheer logistics involved in running a department that has about the same number of sworn officers as the LAPD, Whitmore said. It is responsible not only for policing unincorporated areas of the county and many contract cities but also running the county jail system, staffing all of the Los Angeles County Superior Courts — the largest court system in the U.S. — and patrolling all Metro train lines and stations, Whitmore said.

"It's also important to note that when somebody runs against the sheriff, it's not really bad," the spokesman said. "The vigorous debate and discussion will show exactly how strong this department is and how strong this department has become, ... and that is all due to the work of Sheriff Lee Baca."

James said Baca's reaction could be read otherwise, noting those running for office who are not concerned with challengers don't usually bother to comment on them. The Long Beach police union president added that Baca's handling of the jail committee's criticism is something that could taint voters' views.

"(Baca) has already made public statements that ... he doesn't care whatever other people have said or what committees have found, he'll let the voters decide, which is sort of like thumbing his nose at what has been said," James said.

Whitmore bristled at that suggestion.

"Sheriff Lee Baca may be criticized for a lot of things, but he will never be criticized for thumbing his nose at anybody or dismissing anybody," the spokesman said.

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# Let's do more to protect kids

The needs of adults and institutions too often trump those of children in their care. That could change if we all took it more personally.

**SANDY BANKS**

In middle school, my daughter had a friend who'd spent most of her life in foster care. During the next few years, the girl would pass through almost a dozen foster families, group homes and probation camps.

She had a habit of running away when she felt mistreated or ignored. She'd call us, and I'd drive over to pick her up from some street corner or bus stop. I'd bring her home, mother her for a few days, then talk her into returning to the system that she hated.

"You'll be fine," I remember promising her one night, as we pulled up in front of the North Hills residential center that would be her new home. It wasn't a bad place. I'd visited it. Nice staff, good classes, clean dorms.

She stared out my car window at the fenced-in complex, then asked, a challenge in her voice, "Would you want Danielle to live here?"

Danielle is my daughter. And no, I would not.

I couldn't bring myself to say that, but the silence spoke for me. She shouldered her backpack, brushed off my hug and slammed the car door.

I felt guilty, and wished I'd lied. But she would have seen through it. The truth had already played out in her life: What we are willing to accept for children like her would not be considered good enough for your child, or mine.



The sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church just keeps getting uglier. Not only were alleged molester priests propped up by church leaders, but one was hired by the Los Angeles Unified School District to do "community outreach." District officials knew that defrocked priest Joseph Pina had been accused of sexually abusing a 14-year-old girl, but kept him on the payroll for 10 years.

Is the school district really so hard up for employees that it's willing to hire as a community organizer a priest who fell in love with an eighth-grade girl when he saw her in a Snow White costume?

Meanwhile, a Los Angeles elementary school teacher was jailed last month, charged with sexually abusing 12 little girls, most of them in his classroom. The children told their parents, who contacted the LAPD. Investigating detectives believe there are more than 20 victims.

The teacher, Robert Pimentel, had been accused of "inappropriately touching" children multiple times over the past 10 years. But his principal apparently turned a blind eye to complaints. She never reported them to authorities, as required by child abuse laws, and retired — her pension intact — before she could be fired.

Then there's the Palm-dale woman charged last month with torturing 7- and 8-year-old siblings she'd cared for as a foster parent. Ingrid Brewer had been

encouraged by social workers to adopt the children, though warning signs were clear.

She'd been accused of mistreating eight children, and injuring some, during five years as a foster mother. Social workers noted that the siblings seemed wary and Brewer seemed unable to bond with them or handle their behavior problems.

But the adoption was approved, Brewer kept getting her monthly checks and social workers closed their file. No one, it seems, bothered to ask the children what they thought about it.

Until last month, when the kids ran away and were discovered hiding under a blanket on cold pavement, a few blocks from Brewer's home. The siblings told sheriff's deputies they been locked in their rooms, bound with zip ties, deprived of food, and punished with a hammer and electrical cords.

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I know we won't ever rid society of predators and perverts. There will always be abusive parents, warped teachers and callous bureaucrats.

I understand that there aren't enough foster homes, that social workers are grievously overworked and unsupported. I know union rules protect teachers' rights, and snapping a fifth-grader's bra strap might not be considered a firing offense. I get that "innocent until proven guilty" can be taken to mean

that it's OK to hire an admitted molester as long as he wasn't charged or convicted.

But none of that is any excuse for putting children in harm's way with irresponsible choices.

The social workers, church leaders, school principal and district officials may have been following rules designed to serve adults and guard institutions, but they should have tuned in to more basic instincts and protected vulnerable children.

We want to clear case-loads, sell school building programs, protect a campus from embarrassment or a church from scandal. So the children's needs get lost in the process; they're an abstract concept.

Now we read the newspaper stories and shake our heads. The incompetence, the carelessness... What were those people thinking?

When you imagine your child at the center of the choice, the stakes rise and the questions change.

If the social workers had taken those kids to the park and asked what they thought of their new mom, if the principal had asked little girls privately if their teacher had ever touched them, if archdiocese officials had actually talked to young victims and stopped protecting grown-ups...

If they'd embraced those children as their own, their feelings might have led them to a very different outcome.

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I've thought about that a lot these past few weeks, as I waded through a cascade of news about children harmed by exploitative adults and imperfect institutions.

It hurt to read about the foster kids handed over to an abusive woman who they say tortured them, the dozen students deputies say were abused by a teacher with a history of sexual misconduct complaints, and the priest accused of molestation who was protected by the Los Angeles Archdiocese and then employed to work with families by the Los Angeles Unified School District.

And I can't help but wonder if these cases would have turned out differently if someone had asked the grown-ups in charge what my daughter's friend asked me.

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LATIMES.COM

Thur 2-14-13

Los Angeles



MICHAEL ROBINSON CHAVEZ Los Angeles Times

**MOURNERS SIGN** a guest book in June 2011 at the memorial service Victoria Sandoval's former foster parents held at Calvary Chapel in East Anaheim.

[Children, from A18]

son who was identified as the likely caller to the hot line, social workers closed their inquiry and declared that the child was not at risk.

Three years later, police went to the mother's home following another tip. They found Johnny in a dark closet. Much of his body had been burned by a glue gun and hot spoons. He had been starved, sodomized, punched and forced to eat feces.

And in the case of Victoria Sandoval, "obvious indications of physical abuse were either ignored or not noticed," the report said.

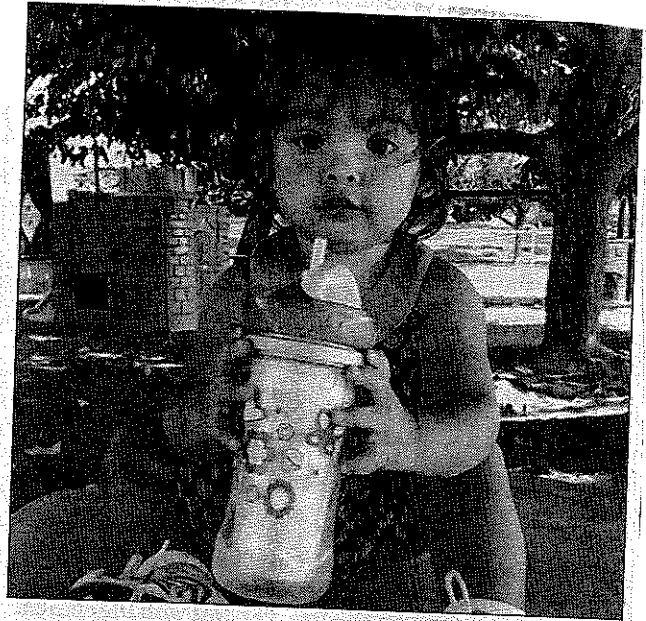
Over a seven-month period during which social workers visited the home, the child lost almost half of her body weight and clumps of hair fell from her head.

She died when she was 25 months old. A rib was fractured. Blood tests suggested she had been thirsty and hungry.

Among the fatal cases reviewed, only one worker — who had falsified a report — was fired.

"Other than that, despite the egregious nature of many of the mistakes made by workers, the most serious discipline has been one 30-day suspension," investigators said.

Browning has trans-



**VICTORIA SANDOVAL** died at 25 months old after social workers returned her to her parents.

ferred or demoted many top managers since the report. More than 30 people are being added to the staff to monitor foster care contractors for fraud and abuse. He has promised to restore the agency's emergency response section as a place for elite, higher-paid workers.

He also has eased the department's focus on keeping children out of foster care. Last year, the agency filed 14,785 court petitions, most of them for removing chil-

dren from their families — an increase from 13,481 the year before.

Efforts to streamline policy manuals and raise standards across the entire department won't be finished until 2015 under the plan approved by county supervisors.

"This is going to be hard work," Browning said.

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# 'General lack of skill' found in caseworkers

[Children, from A1]

was unaware of the previous calls, according to the report, which was obtained by The Times through a source.

Philip Browning, who became the agency's permanent director two months before the report was completed in April, recently embarked on a reorganization involving new assignments, training and procedures for many of the department's 6,800 employees.

The report's lead author, Amy Shek Naamani, has been hired by Browning and placed in a senior position to help guide the effort.

The four-year blueprint for reform — the first comprehensive effort in a decade — covers many of the recommendations outlined in the report. Browning said his goal was to restore "common sense, accountability and critical thinking" to the county's child welfare network.

"It's important for people to know that this can't happen overnight," he added.

The report found that many of the department's errors were rooted in its guiding strategy to keep children with their families and avoid "detention" — putting them in foster care.

Though that preference is necessary when the child is not at substantial risk, social workers became blind to dangerous family situations, according to the report.

"Individual offices and leadership [within the agency] celebrated as their number of detentions decreased and individual social workers were praised for low detention numbers; all while more children were dying while left in their parent(s) care," the report said.

Investigators focused on weaknesses in the department's emergency response section, which looks into complaints to the child abuse hot line and often is the first posting for rookie social workers.

The report found a "gen-

## Broken

Systemic failures by L.A. County's child protective agency played a part in 13 deaths and a torture case:

- ① Failures during the initial child abuse investigation
- ② Misuse of questionnaires used to calculate a child's risk
- ③ Miscommunication among agencies over a family's situation
- ④ Mistakes by managers

	①	②	③	④
Jorge T.	●	●	●	●
Deandre G.	●	●	●	●
Vyctorya S.	●	●	●	●
Zachary H.	○	○	○	○
Viola V.	●	●	●	●
Adrian R.	●	●	●	●
Abigail M.	●	●	●	●
Cynthia F.	●	●	○	●
Johnny C.*	●	●	○	●
Hakeem F.	●	●	○	●
Parrish G.	○	○	○	○
Christian D.	●	○	●	●
Michael N.	●	○	●	●
Erica J.	●	●	●	●
Valery D.	●	○	●	●
Amanda C.	●	●	●	●

\*Torture case; child still alive

Source: Los Angeles County Children's Special Investigation Unit

KHANG NGUYEN Los Angeles Times

eral lack of skill" among those caseworkers. Rules requiring master's degrees in social work have been waived for half of the department's frontline personnel and all of their supervisors.

Once hired, "every warm body" was "passed through" by the department's training academy, spending just four hours learning how to pull information from often reluctant subjects, the report said.

Investigations tend to rely on bureaucratic rules, not common sense and close observation, the report

'It's important for people to know that this can't happen overnight.'

— PHILIP BROWNING, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, on reorganizing the agency to better protect children

found. The department has issued more than 4,000 pages of policies detailing how social workers should do their jobs.

"Creating social work road maps with this level of 'how-to' is like expecting a therapist to use a script that tells her what questions to ask and what responses to expect from her client in a therapy session," the report said.

Lowell Goodman, a spokesman for the union representing the social workers, said, "Even the finest social workers in the country could not perform their best work in this system."

"Paperwork and the relentless attention to following [thousands of pages of] policies supersedes hands-on social work in importance," he said.

The report found that some basic steps to determine the safety of a home are ignored.

In one torture case cited in the report, a caller said a young boy, Johnny, was being beaten and underfed by his drug-addicted mother.

Social workers scheduled five drug tests for the mother, according to child welfare records. She missed or refused every one. They scheduled meetings to discuss the matter. She missed those too.

Without interviewing key witnesses, including the per-

[See Children, A19]

# 'Blind leading blind' at county child services

Thur 2-14-83 L A Times

A scathing report faults the agency in more than a dozen deaths. New director has begun changes.

BY JASON SONG AND  
GARRETT THEROLF

A stifling bureaucracy and inept workforce have crippled Los Angeles County's child protective agency, resulting in a system that allowed children to remain in unsafe homes, sometimes to die at the hands of their caretakers, according to a confidential county report.

The investigation, conducted by an independent counsel for the Board of Supervisors, looked at 15 recent child deaths and a torture case. In all but two instances, investigators found that casework errors began with the agency's first contact with the children and contributed to their deaths.

The report is the harshest assessment of the Department of Children and Family Services in recent memory, echoing complaints from child advocates that the county has rejected for years.

Investigators largely blamed the department's problems on its decision to place its least experienced social workers in its most crucial job: assessing dangers to children. Many of those workers — facing a total of 160,000 child abuse hot line calls each year — are "just 'doing their time,'" according to the report.

Supervisors are poorly qualified and often disregard policy, creating a situation akin to "the blind leading the blind," with workers rarely held accountable for "egregious" errors, the report said.

weekend stays in jail for prior offenses.

A month later, Abigail was found dead, covered in bruises that the parents allegedly attempted to conceal with blue paint.

Viola Vanclef, 2, allegedly was killed by her foster mother, Kiana Barker. Before Viola's death, the county's child abuse hot line received seven complaints about Barker. Each time, the investigating social worker

The result has been deaths that might have been prevented had social workers taken basic steps to assess the risks.

Two-year-old Abigail, for example, was returned to her parents after social workers failed to look into their extensive abuse history and question their